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AUTHOR Ediger, Marlow
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ABSTRACT

Too frequently textbooks used in class are criticized heavily by educators. In and of itself, a textbook is neither good nor bad. If the text has been carefully chosen, there may be reasons for criticizing its use. Textbooks should always be carefully evaluated when new basals are chosen so that the very best one(s) are selected for a class. Committees need to be at work to make the final choices. Each prospective textbook needs thorough appraisal in terms of quality. Once a textbook is chosen, the teacher may use it as a guide. Within that framework, the teacher may choose a variety of learning opportunities for pupils to supplement content in the textbook. A multimedia approach should be used to provide for individual differences. A textbook should never be used with no other instructional materials. Teachers should use textbooks in a flexible manner, and they should be discouraged from saying they teach well due to not using a textbook. Quality instruction rests upon the uses made of textbooks by creative teachers and pupils in teaching and learning situations. (RS)

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Textbooks in the Language Arts: Good, Neutral, or Bad?

by Marlow Ediger

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TEXTBOOKS IN THE LANGUAGE ARTS
GOOD, NEUTRAL, OR BAD?

Educational historians have long debated the concepts of "good," "neutral," and "bad" when discussing views pertaining to human nature. Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) believed that humans at birth are born as good individuals. His predecessor Jean Jacque Rousseau (1712-1776) stressed that "all things are good as they come from the hands of the Maker." It is society that makes the good human 'bad." Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776- 1841) advocated that humans are born as "neutral" beings. The mind is like a blank sheet at birth. Herbart's predecessor John Locke (1632- 1704) had adhered to the "mind as a blank sheet" concept or Tabula Rasa theory. Puritans who came to the shores of what is now the United States advocated that human beings are born in sin and therefore are born evil. There is no hope for sinful human beings in this world; physical punishment is necessary to drive evilness out of children, according to Puritan philosophy of education.

Numerous writers in educational journals and speakers at teacher education conventions imply that their teaching is excellent if textbooks are not used in the instructional sequence. There were numerous reasons given in the past for the use of basal textbooks. The manual section provides teachers with suggestions for objectives, learning opportunities, and evaluation procedures. This can be a large part of the curriculum and it does provide teachers assistance in planning and implementing the curriculum..

I believe textbooks used as basals are neutral. Textbooks are neither "good" nor "evil." The text provides subject matter for all pupils and can be used as a basis for planning an entire unit of study.

Higher Levels of Cognition and the Textbook

I see nothing that would hinder pupils from engaging in higher levels of cognition when a textbook is used in teaching and learning. Comprehension of content can be stressed using a discussion. It is true

that questions raised may emphasize factual items largely or only, but that can be true when concrete and semiconcrete materials of instruction are used also. In followup activities using a textbook, the teacher may ask questions covering its contents which stress making comparisons, judging accuracy of statements made, detecting bias, and analyzing subject matter. These are skills stressed that reflect critical thinking. Creative thing might be stressed by asking for a unique setting in literature different from the one emphasized in the story. "What-- if" questions are very salient in social studies to indicate diverse happenings than the one that occurred if a different cause had been in evidence. Predictions based on a knowledge base can truly emphasize novelty and originality in creative thinking. Problem solving as a higher cognitive level objective may certainly be encouraged when learners raise questions covering subject matter read from the textbook. Much data from a variety of reference sources may be used to obtain needed information to secure an hypothesis. I fail to see where the textbook is the villain when teachers do stress rote learning of subject matter. Memorization as a major goal of instruction might occur just as frequently when texts are <u>not</u> used in ongoing lessons and units of study.

Social development of pupils can be in evidence when textbooks are used by having time for cooperative learning. There can be questions identified by pupils with teacher guidance which provide situations emphasizing committee work to attain necessary content. Learners in a committee may plan, organize, and report information obtained in cooperative learning. Enjoyment of learning might be a further objective achieved here. Quality interactions are needed. Respect for others becomes a primary objective of instruction in cooperative learning.

Comments are frequently made that textbook content is dull and uninteresting. Teachers who plan an instructional sequence without textbook usage might also have a series of uninspiring tasks for pupils. Thus, if a learning activity is dull, what can the teacher do to make it interesting? I have said that textbooks are "neutral" and neither "good"

nor "bad." The teacher in using a textbook in teaching must finds ways to interest pupil learning. There are numerous ways of doing this. The teacher may change from pupils' reading the textbook and its contents largely, to conducting a lively discussion pertaining to the 'dull" content. In the discussion, the discussion might emphasize something learned yesterday or in a previous day. There are exciting questions that a creative teacher may discuss with pupils and achieve learner interest in the ongoing lesson. For example, I have seen pupils turned off in studying colonial life from the textbook in the early 1600's until the teacher asked the following question -- With all the problems, we have studied faced by colonists, what would you have done to make life more pleasant had you lived at that time? The teacher here changed from discussing subject matter directly from the text to a practical problem, involving learners in the classroom. Pupils decided here they would brainstorm possible solutions to the problem. Each response was written down and no one was to duplicate what had been said previously. Seemingly from a turned off set of learners, they became highly motivated and interested as the brain storming continued. With divergent thinking and creativity in evidence, pupils came up with thirty five ways to make life more pleasant in the days of the colonists. No value judgments were made as each response was given by a learner. The responses were grouped together if related, at the end of the brain storming session. The textbook is a neutral device and can provide a springboard for novel learning opportunities. It does not make for conformity behavior unless the teacher teaches so that rigidity and formality are strongly stressed in each lesson.

Sometimes critics of using textbooks write in journal articles that teachers only lecture when using a basal. There would be no reason for doing this. Lecturing can be emphasized with or without a basal textbook used in ongoing lessons and units of study. I hope educators here are not confusing the word "lecture" with a "needed explanations " approach in teaching. Certainly, there are needed explanations that a teacher should present meaningfully and in an interesting manner in a

lesson presentation. A college/ university type lecture lasting thirty to fifty minutes would waste teacher and pupil time in the elementary and secondary school. The attention span of elementary and secondary pupils needs to be observed so that when needed, the teacher may change to a different type or kind of learning opportunity. It is of utmost importance to develop and maintain pupil interest in subject matter and skills presented, otherwise learning will occur at a low level of attainment. The following may occur with or with textbook use:

1. rote learning and memorization.
2. passive recipients of knowledge.
3. inattentive pupils in class.
4. sameness in learning activities.
5. teaching as telling.
6. autocratic styles of teaching.
7. teacher dominated curriculum.
8. factual learning with higher levels of cognition omitted.
9. uncaring teachers and rigid requirements.
10. meaningless learning.

Rote Learning, Memorization, and Passive Pupils

The teacher is a leader in the curriculum when using the text in teaching to develop within pupils the desire to use, understand, analyze, relate knowledge, and assess it in terms of criteria such as accuracy and value. The manual of the text does not dictate but provides recommendations as to possible learning opportunities to provide pupils. These suggestions for learning opportunities provide teachers with alternative avenues of instruction. Any content can be used from the text by the teacher in emphasizing higher levels of cognition in teaching and learning situations. Lower levels of cognition may be stressed by the teacher just as soon in a nontextbook situation as compared to the use of basals in teaching- learning situations.

Inattentive Pupils and Sameness of Learning Activities

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The teacher may always use other learning opportunities than those contained in the textbook. A variety of experiences should be in the offing for pupils. Why? Learners differ from each other in learning styles possessed. There are pupils who desire to learn from the concrete more so than from the semiconcrete, and vice versa. Selected pupils who read well may wish to do much reading in order to achieve optimally. Thus for the latter pupil the abstract may be the best means of learning.

There are many activities that emphasize the concrete, semiconcrete, and the abstract facets of learning. The teacher needs to locate and use computers, video disks, video tapes, films, filmstrips, computerized programs, slides, illustrations, trade books, single concept film loops, and cassette tapes, among others, to secure pupil attention. These audio visual aids provide numerous avenues of learning which relate directly to lesson and unit information contained in the basal textbook. If texts are used or not, the teacher must secure pupil attention in the curriculum whereby learners become actively involved in learning with questions, problems, and comments.

Teaching as Telling and Autocratic Teaching

Explanations have to be given by teachers to pupils in order to clarify, enrich, and stimulate learning. These explanations should be brief, clear, and to the point. Quality explanations should not be confused with the concept of lecture in the curriculum.

No teacher can ever teach what is necessary in scope and sequence using pure induction or inquiry methods only. Related explanations given by the teacher enhance clarity in pupil problem solving, as well as in critical and creative thinking. The teacher sets the stage in guiding pupils to select problems based on textbook or related materials such as from an audio visual presentation.

Teacher Dominated Curriculum and Factual Learning

Teachers may follow a basal text religiously in teaching. Each

page is assigned for reading. Exercises in the text that relate directly to what has been read may be assigned to pupils to complete. The teacher alone corrects all papers and hands them back to pupils to be corrected where errors existed as marked. The teacher then lectures to pupils about the contents contained in the textbook after the assigned pages have been read by pupils.

Under circumstances such as the above, the chances are pupils will not understand what has been taught, nor will they retain content that should have been learned.

I would rather see novel approaches used in teaching which, in the following example, is based on textbook subject matter. Learners were given an overview of the new content to be read. This was done by having pupils look at and discussed related pictures contained in the text. A videotape further elaborating on ideas within the textbook was viewed and discussed. As the discussion progressed the teacher printed in neat manuscript letters words contained in the new reading selection. After pupils had completed the silent reading activity from the textbook, they were asked what could be done to show how much content had been learned. The following were some of the answers given: making a diorama pertaining to ideas read, developing a movie set with an accompanying tape recording for each scene drawn, creatively dramatizing several scenes contained in the reading selection, videotaping a formal dramatics presentation, and presenting a reading theater presentation. Each pupil volunteered to serve on a committee to develop one of the above named projects. Learners who served as chairpersons gave progress reports to others in the classroom at selected intervals. Ultimately, pupils in each committee presented their group project to other learners in the classroom setting.

The teacher then led a discussion covering content read. The questions in the discussion zeroed in upon "how" and particularly "why" questions. This is one approach, among others, which a teacher may use to guide pupils in attaching meaning to what has been learned. A variety of procedures may be used by the creative teacher in assisting

pupils to understand that which has been learned.

The scope of the curriculum in using textbooks in ongoing units of study may be broadened to include enrichment materials. Sequence in the curriculum may be changed from what is contained in a text to something more in harmony with learner interests and meaning. The teacher definitely can change both scope and sequence contained in any textbook if there is a purposeful need to do so. Textbooks are neutral devices, neither good nor bad, but may be used to encourage optimal learner progress.

Some of the student and cooperating teachers in public schools I have supervised have done an excellent job of teaching through the use of teacher- pupil panning. Pupils then may select questions for discussion based on what was read from the basal. They might also decide with the teacher which tasks and projects to work on directly or indirectly related to subject matter read from the text. Learners with teacher guidance may appraise the quality of the discussion/ projects using cooperatively developed criteria. Thus the psychology of humanism with its learner input into the curriculum may be strongly stressed when using textbooks as one material of instruction.

Uncaring Teachers and Meaningless Learning

Uncaring teachers may be in the classroom regardless if a textbook is used in the curriculum or not. The teacher needs to accept all pupils as having much worth intrinsically. He/ she needs to be conscientious in teaching well so that pupils attain vital objectives be it from the text or other stimulating material of instruction. Teachers need to be caring persons in order to evaluate and teach so that each learner may attain optimally. Good human relations must be in evidence between teachers and pupils so that salient affective objectives are attained by the latter. Teachers present models for pupils to emulate. Learners should like school and what it has to offer. Objectives of instruction should be achievable by pupils. These objectives should stress balance based on rational thought between and among knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

In Closing

Too frequently textbooks used in class are criticized heavily by educators. If the text has been carelessly chosen, there may be reasons for criticizing its use. Textbooks should always be carefully evaluated when new basals are chosen so that the very best one(s) are selected for a class. Committees need to be at work to make the final choices. Each prospective textbook needs thorough appraisal in terms of quality. Once a textbook has been chosen, the teacher may use it as a guide. Within that framework, the teacher may choose a variety of learning opportunities for pupil to supplement content in the textbook. A multimedia approach should be used to provide for individual differences. A creative teacher might broaden the scope and improve the sequence of activities and experiences for pupils. Never should a text be used with no other materials of instruction. If there are parts of the text that lack accurate or has vague content, the teacher may emphasize critical thinking in using other information sources in checking accuracy of textbook content. I would suggest using any textbook in a flexible manner. I would, however, discourage teachers from saying that they teach well due to not using a textbook. In and of itself, a textbook is neither good or bad. It is the teacher that will emphasize quality in the curriculum with a multimedia approach in providing for the interests, needs, and purposes of pupils. Even using a term such as "multimedia" does not necessarily make for a quality curriculum. It depends upon the effects the diverse media has upon the learner. Sometimes, researchers have found that at the .05 level, plan A of instruction is better that plan B. Does that mean the new approach should be used if research results are consistently true in comparing plan A and plan B? Definitely not! There are still numerous pupils who did better with plan B as compared to plan A. There are so many variables to consider in the act of teaching.

I would like to make the following recommendations in textbook selection:

1. have all teachers affected by the choice help in making the final decision as to which textbook to adopt.

2. take ample time in making the ultimate decision in which text to accept and use.

3. permit teachers to take home with them textbooks for evaluation that are being considered for adoption.

4. respect statements made by teachers in collaboration situations where choices are being considered for textbook adoption.

5. try to reach consensus, not voting, when the final choices are made for textbook selection for a class or course.

Remember, textbooks are neither good nor bad in and of themselves, but quality rests upon their uses made by creative pupils and teachers in teaching and learning situations.

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